

# STATE SYMBOLS

## State Flag

The State Flag was designed by LeRoy Reeves of the Third Regiment, Tennessee Infantry, who made the following explanation of his design:

*The three stars are of pure white, representing the three grand divisions of the state. They are bound together by the endless circle of the blue field, the symbol being three bound together in one -- an indissoluble trinity. The large field is crimson. The final blue bar relieves the sameness of the crimson field and prevents the flag from showing too much crimson when hanging limp. The white edgings contrast more strongly the other colors.*

A description of the State Flag was set out in the Code in 1905 (TCA 4-1-301) and has only been altered once since then.

**4-1-301. State flag or banner.-** The flag or banner of the state of Tennessee shall be of the following design, colors, and proportions, to wit, an oblong flag or banner in length one and two thirds ( $1 \frac{2}{3}$ ) times its width, the principal field of same to be of color red, but the flag or banner ending at its free or outer end in a perpendicular bar of blue, of uniform width, running from side to side, that is to say, from top to bottom of the flag or banner, and separated from the red field by a narrow margin or stripe of white of uniform width; the width of the white stripe to be one fifth ( $1/5$ ) that of the blue bar; and the total width of the bar and stripe together to be equal to one eighth ( $1/8$ ) of the width of the flag. In the center of the red field shall be a smaller circular field of blue, separated from the surrounding red field by a circular margin or stripe of white of uniform width and of the same width as the straight margin or stripe first mentioned. The breadth or diameter of the circular blue field, exclusive of the white margin, shall be equal to one half ( $1/2$ ) of the width of the flag. Inside the circular blue field shall be three (3) five-pointed stars of white distributed at equal intervals around a point, the center of the blue field, and of such size and arrangement that one (1) point of each of the other two (2) around the center point of the field; and the two (2) outer points of each star shall approach as nearly as practicable without actually touching the periphery of the blue field. The arrangement of the three (3) stars shall be such that the centers of no two (2) stars shall be in a line parallel to either the side or end of the flag, but intermediate between the same; and the highest star shall be the one nearest the upper confined corner of the flag. [Acts 1905, ch. 498; Shan., § 92a1; Code 1932., § 101; T.C.A. (orig. ed.), § 4-106.]

## State Seal

Even though the provision for the Seal of the State of Tennessee was made in the Constitution in 1796, no action was taken until 1801 when a Legislative commission was appointed to create a seal and a motto. In 1987 the description of the seal was placed into the statutes.

**4-1-314. Great seal of the state of Tennessee.-** (a) The great seal of the state of Tennessee shall be in the shape of a circle. The circumference of the circle shall bear the words "THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE," and in the lower part of the circumference shall be the date "1796," being the year in which the constitution of Tennessee was adopted and Tennessee became one to the United States of America.

(b) Inside the upper semicircle of the circle shall be set the numerals "XVI," being the number of the state in chronological order within the United States; below the numerals shall be the figures of a plough, sheaf of wheat, and cotton plant, emblematic of agriculture within the estate; and under the base of the upper semicircle shall be the word "AGRICULTURE."

(c) Inside the lower semicircle of the circle shall be set the figure of a boat with sail, emblematic of commercial activity in the state; and below this figure the word "COMMERCE."

(d) The size of the seal embossed shall be not greater in diameter than two and one quarter inches ( $2 \frac{1}{4}$ ") nor smaller in diameter than one and three quarter inches ( $1 \frac{3}{4}$ ").

(e) The size of printed seals shall conform to the ranges of sizes as permitted by the rules of the state publication committee.

(f) Until a different rendering of this design is submitted by the governor to the secretary of state and approved by resolution by both houses of the general assembly, voting separately, the design currently in use is hereby validated and adopted, to wit. [Acts 1987, ch. 402, § 1.]

### **State Tree**

Chapter 204 of the Public Acts of the 1947 General Assembly designated the tulip poplar as the official State tree of Tennessee. (TCA 4-1-305)

### **State Wildflower**

The passion flower was designated the official State wildflower by Chapter 16 of the Public Acts of 1973. (TCA 4-1-306)

### **State Cultivated Flower**

The iris is designated the State cultivated flower by Chapter 16 of the Public Acts of 1973. While not so designated, the purple iris is generally considered the state flower. (TCA 4-1-307)

### **State Bird**

The mockingbird, generally accepted as the State bird, was selected by the Tennessee Ornithological Society on April 11, 1933, rather than by an act of the legislature, and confirmed by Senate Joint Resolution No. 51, adopted by the General Assembly in that same year.

### **State Game Bird**

The bobwhite quail is designated the official state game bird by Chapter 775 of the Public Acts of 1988. (TCA 4-1-318)

### **State Wild Animal**

The raccoon was accepted by the 87th General Assembly as the official state wild animal. House Joint Resolution No. 156 was adopted in 1971.

### **State Insects**

The firefly, or lightning bug beetle, and the ladybug, or ladybird, beetle are the official state insects, designated by Chapter 292 of the Public Acts of 1975. (TCA 4-1-308)

### **State Commercial Fish**

The channel catfish was designated the official state commercial fish by Chapter 489 of the Public Acts of 1988. (TCA 4-1-316)

### **State Sport Fish**

The large-mouth bass is designated the official state sport fish in Chapter 489 of the Public Acts of 1988. (TCA 4-1-317)

### **State Agricultural Insect**

Public Chapter 725 of 1990 designated the honeybee the State Agricultural Insect (TCA 4-1-308).

### **State Butterfly**

The Zebra Swallowtail was designated as Tennessee's official butterfly by Public Chapter 896 by the 99th General Assembly in 1995.

### **State Amphibian**

The Tennessee Cave Salamander was named official state amphibian by Public Chapter 367 of the 99th General Assembly in 1995.

### **State Reptile**

The Eastern Box Turtle was designated official state reptile by Public Chapter 367 of the 99th General Assembly in 1995.

### **State Rock**

Limestone was declared the official State rock by Chapter 42 of the Public Acts of 1979. (TCA 4-1-309) Earlier in 1969, the General Assembly adopted House Joint Resolution No. 42 which declared agate the state rock.

### **State Gem**

The Pearl, taken from fresh water rivers of the State, was declared the official State gem by Chapter 192 of the Public Acts of 1979. (TCA 4-1-310)

### **State Songs**

Tennessee has five state songs, adopted on various occasions, as indicated below: (TCA 4-1-302)

"My Homeland, Tennessee" by Nell Grayson Taylor and Roy Lamont Smith, adopted by House Joint Resolution 36, 1925;

"When It's Iris Time in Tennessee" by Willa Mae Waid, adopted by Chapter 154 of the Public Acts of 1935;

"My Tennessee" by Francis Hannah Trantum, adopted by Senate Joint Resolution 35, 1955, as the official public school song;

"The Tennessee Waltz" by Redd Stewart and Pee Wee King, adopted by Senate Joint Resolution 9, 1965; and,

"Rocky Top" by Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, adopted by Chapter 545 of the Public Acts of 1982.

"Tennessee" by Vivian Rorie adopted by House Joint Resolution 744 for the 97th General Assembly.

### **State Slogan**

The official slogan for Tennessee: "Tennessee--America at its Best" was adopted by Chapter 33 of the Public Acts of 1965 and may be used in advertising for the state and its attractions. (TCA 4-1-304)

### **State Motto**

According to Chapter 402 of the Public Acts of 1987, the motto of the state of Tennessee is "Agriculture and Commerce", as proclaimed on the great seal of the state of Tennessee since 1801. (TCA 4-1-315)

### **State Poem**

The Poem "Oh Tennessee, My Tennessee" by Admiral William Lawrence, was designated the official state poem by Chapter 111 of the Acts of 1973. (TCA 4-1-303)

### **State Folk Dance**

The square dance was designated the state dance by Chapter 829 of the Public Acts of 1980. (TCA 4-1-312)

### **State Fine Art**

Porcelain painting (china painting) is recognized as a fine art in Tennessee by Chapter 55 of the Public Acts of 1981. (TCA 4-1-313)

### **Official Railroad Museum**

The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum, in Hamilton County, is designated the official railroad museum in Tennessee by Chapter 547 of the Public Acts of 1978. (TCA 4-1-311)

### **Official Language**

English was established as the official and legal language by Chapter 821 of the Public Acts of 1984. TCA 4-1-404 states: "All communications and publications, including ballots, produced by governmental entities in Tennessee shall be in English, and instruction in the public schools and colleges of Tennessee shall be conducted in English unless the nature of the course would require otherwise."

### **Poet Laureate**

House Joint Resolution 133 of 1995 named Margaret "Maggi" Britton Vaughn as Poet Laureate of Tennessee.

### **Ambassador of Letters**

Harriette Louise Bias Allen, was named "Tennessee's Ambassador of Letters" by House Joint Resolution No. 222 in 1977.

### **American Sign Language**

By Public Chapter 121 of 1989 (effective April 18, 1989), American Sign Language was recognized and adopted as the official and native sign language of the deaf in Tennessee. (TCA 4-1-105).

(\*Compiler's note, All state symbols information courtesy of Tennessee Blue Book, published by the Tennessee Secretary of State)